A Starting Device

To take off by engine power alone in Dayton's light winds, the Wright brothers had to lay out as much as 240 feet of wooden rails. If the breeze shifted, the track had to be moved and pegged down again to face the new wind direction.

But after they built a catapult in September 1904, the Wrights could launch their flyer with only 60 feet of rail.

It is evident that we will have to build a starting device that will render us independent of wind and are now designing one….

Wilbur Wright, August 8, 1904

Catapult-assisted Takeoffs

A team of horses pulled a 1600-pound counterweight to the top of the wooden derrick. When the weight fell sixteen feet, it added enough speed to get a flying machine airborne—regardless of wind direction and strength.

The catapult in front of you is a replica.